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## ABSTRACT

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The Assessment of Student and Faculty Educational Orientations:  
A Research Strategy for Conflict Assessment

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## ABSTRACT

Although much discussion has centered on the "relative fit" of students with programs and/or institutions, there has been little systematic examination of student educational orientations and their relationship to similar or dissimilar orientations held by faculty in the same institution. This paper highlights that incongruence in student and faculty views regarding curricular-instructional issues is associated with evaluation of courses/instructors, student dissatisfaction, and attrition or early student withdrawal from college. The survey instruments and research techniques employed comprise a direct method of detecting potential student-faculty conflict, with implications for improving institutional viability and responsiveness to changing educational conditions and needs.

## The Assessment of Student and Faculty Educational Orientations:

### A Research Strategy for Conflict Assessment

The abundant research which has investigated college student characteristics has usually focused on student background variables, general personality characteristics, perceptions of the college environment and cognitive and affective development during college. As a result of this research, much discussion has centered on the "relative fit" of students with programs and/or institutions. Many researchers have interpreted their data as suggesting that students who are incongruent in various ways with the institutional ethos and values will more likely be dissatisfied, more likely to leave the institution or less likely to profit from their educational experience. (cf. Pace, 1966; Pervin, 1967, 1968; Stern, 1970). Currently an entire national project to supply better information for prospective college students is based on the assumption that with better information students will better be able to choose institutions and programs which are congruent with their needs and interests.

Most commonly, research on student satisfaction and student-institution fit has examined the congruence of the student's personality or background variables with the total institutional environment or aspects of that environment. (Richardson, 1970; Nafiger, Holland and Gottfredson, 1975). When the research has been more specifically focused, the peer group has usually been considered the main influence which determines student satisfaction. Except as a byproduct of the many attempts to develop instruments which might measure teaching effectiveness, there has been little systematic examination of student orientations toward the purpose of their education, toward the process of education in the classroom, and toward the relationship between faculty and students in determining

the nature of the academic endeavor. Even less common is the comparison of the educational views of students and faculty. In part, educational views of students and faculty and the relationship between them have not been studied because accurate information on faculty educational attitudes is difficult to obtain. Despite the pioneering work of Gamson (1966), only recently has a new line of research begun to shed light on faculty views toward the educational process. The most notable example is the study by Wilson et al. (1975) of faculty self-reported behaviors in six diverse institutions.

Yet, as postsecondary institutions face the challenge of maintaining institutional vitality in the uncertain economic times ahead, the question of student-institution fit assumes even greater importance. The question is most often phrased in terms of attracting and retaining students. At other times it is discussed as a concern for dealing with the educational needs of increasingly heterogeneous student bodies. Moreover, as students' "consumer" rights in education are further clarified, it may be that students will become more vocal about the nature and quality of their educational experiences.

Conflicts between the two main sets of actors on the educational scene, faculty and students, surfaced dramatically during the late sixties. Although the conflict has now been institutionalized on most campuses through the inclusion of students in governance bodies, basic philosophical differences still exist and appear in debates over even minor educational policies. One substantial difference of opinion which has received wide national attention is the debate over "career-oriented" versus "liberal" education.

Recognition of where the parties stand is the first step toward resolution of conflict. Thus, it is critical that institutions gain a better view of the educational orientations of the key participants in the educational enterprise. While we would hardly expect students and faculty to have identical attitudes on most educational issues, it is valuable to know how different these attitudes are, and on what dimensions differences occur. Furthermore, it is important to determine if relationships exist between these differences and the satisfaction and withdrawal patterns of students. The next critical step, then, would be to use such information in adapting institutional policies to be more responsive to student views where such modifications in educational practice can be made without sacrificing the mission of the institution. Jonathan Warren has phrased the problem most succinctly:

If the predilections of faculty members and of groups of students can be matched reasonably well, diversity even in a small program can be vitalizing. And when disparate purpose or approaches do not seem capable of a satisfactory accommodation, making these disparities known can head off much frustration. (1973, p. 38)

Warren suggested that entering students might be presented with a questionnaire describing a number of instructional options and asked to indicate their preferences. Such information, he felt, was needed both for effective program planning and for subsequent evaluation.

Recent pilot studies conducted by the authors have used a similar approach and have demonstrated that congruence (or incongruence in some situations) of student and faculty educational orientations is often

associated with student satisfaction, with student attrition and early transfer from a college, and with evaluation of courses and instructors.

These investigations have employed two recently developed survey inventories, the Student Orientations Survey (Morstain, 1973a) and its counterpart, the Faculty Orientations Survey. The inventories assess attitudes about the purposes of a college education, preferences for different modes of learning, and views on student and faculty roles in decision-making related to the instructional process. The advantage of these surveys is that they query faculty and students directly about their educational preferences rather than using high inference measures such as personality inventories or collections of background characteristics. There is, of course, no clear assurance that people behave the way they say they will in a paper and pencil survey. That determination is a next step in the progress of this type of research.

The Student Orientations Survey (SOS) is an attitudinal instrument containing eighty questions to be answered on a four-point Likert-type scale. Answers range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Factor analysis of the student instrument has shown that the items cluster into ten attitudinal scales ranging in internal reliability from .70 to .88 (coefficient alpha). Six of the ten attitudinal scales have been utilized in comparing student views with the forty-eight parallel items on the Faculty Orientations Survey (FOS). There are three general orientation dimensions, and each dimension is assessed by two eight-item scales:



<u>"Preparatory"</u> SOS/FOS SCALES	EDUCATIONAL ORIENTATIONS (DIMENSIONS)	<u>"Exploratory"</u> SOS/FOS SCALES
Achievement	1. PURPOSE (attitudes regarding the purpose(s) of a college or university education)	Inquiry
Assignment Learning	2. PROCESS (preferences for different modes of teaching and learning)	Independent Study
Assessment	3. POWER (attitudes regarding decision-making and student-faculty roles)	Interaction

Given the pattern of scale intercorrelations, three scales cluster together in what has been interpreted as a general "Preparatory" orientation to college, while three other scales are related to a general "Exploratory" orientation to college. That is, it appears that while college is most highly valued by some for its preparatory function -- in terms of acquiring useful knowledge, skills, vocations, and social roles -- it is valued most highly by others for its exploratory possibilities -- that is, for the opportunities it affords for exploring one's interests, ideas, and personal identity.

Brief scale descriptions follow:

Achievement (Ach): taps a practical, goal-oriented outlook regarding the purpose of education, a view which gauges various aspects of the college experience in terms of their future usefulness;

Assignment Learning (AL): relates to a preference for structured teaching-learning arrangements which emphasize formal courses with specific, clear-cut assignments;

Assessment (As): relates to student-faculty power relationships which emphasize the importance of formal evaluations by faculty of student work; grades are



valued because they provide a measure of a student's abilities as well as some incentive for using those abilities;

Inquiry (Inq): regarding the purpose of education, stresses the value of studying the relationships between various fields, and the view that learning is valuable for its own sake irrespective of vocational concerns; "learning how to learn" is also important to high scorers;

Independent Study (IS): taps a preference for informal, less structured courses in which students set their own goals and standards and pursue their own interests with faculty supervision; high scorers place value on student freedom and independence in pursuing a college education;

Interaction (Int): reflects a desire that faculty and students share in the planning of courses, programs, and academic requirements; high scorers prefer a collegial relationship between students and faculty in educational decision-making.

The FOS scales for faculty are composed of the same items as found in the SOS inventory, but worded in such a way that faculty respond from their point of view. An example from the "Independent Study" (Process) scale:

SOS item: Instead of taking a regular course, I would rather have an individually-tailored "learning contract" with a faculty member.

FOS item: Instead of offering a regular course, I would rather have individually-tailored "learning contracts" with students.

For adequate interpretation of any new set of inventories, one of the first steps is to amass sufficient data so that the general description of

the population is known. The SOS was developed on a group of 4279 students at eight dissimilar institutions and now has been used at over forty-five colleges and universities. The current standard scores are based on a normative sample of 3806 students which generally represents the proportional distribution of full time students in four-year colleges and universities in the United States. The norms are being updated regularly as more data is collected but it already is possible to compare student profiles from a given campus with a national sample and with "institutional-type" norms.

On the basis of these data some general observations can be made. Students enrolled in different curricula have quite different profiles representing their educational orientations on the six scales. There is, then, considerable evidence that students who select themselves into various educational programs differ in their educational preferences and views (Morstain, 1973b; 1973c). For example, students in professional curricula, such as nursing, business administration, engineering, education and home economics, tend to score higher on Achievement, indicating a goal or career-directed purpose of education, than do students in arts and sciences programs. Undergraduate students in professional schools also tend to score lower on Inquiry, a scale espousing the purpose of education as the exploration of ideas for their own sake. In one study (Morstain, 1973c) students who selected an experimental curriculum were those who expressed preferences for independent study options and an egalitarian relationship with faculty. In contrast, those who chose a traditional liberal arts program at the same school preferred more determination of the academic program by faculty and more formal course settings in which to learn.

Even among liberal arts students, however, there are differences which one might anticipate. Students in natural sciences are more likely to prefer a structured learning environment than are their peers in humanities and social sciences. Moreover, in a pilot project involving six liberal arts colleges, certain variations by institution appeared. The profile of student preferences at one college was as different from that at another ostensibly similar liberal arts school as was the profile of students at an experimental school compared with its traditional counterpart. (Stark and Morstain, in progress).

In this same liberal arts college project now underway, information was also gathered from faculty. What is initially most striking about the data gathered thus far are the disparities between faculty and student attitudes on the six scales of the FOS and SOS. For example, the data confirms previous evidence that even students enrolled in liberal arts colleges see their educational goals at least partly related to earning a living after college. Liberal arts faculty are more inclined to believe that learning for its own sake is the primary purpose of education. This finding is not unexpected but it is one which colleges often have not dealt with openly. (See Fig. 1)

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

The greatest disparities between student and faculty views in nearly all institutions studied thus far concern the most desirable modes of learning and who should decide what is to be learned. Faculty as a group are more likely to believe that students learn best by an orderly method, structured and assessed by those who are experts in the discipline (Assignment

Learning and Assessment). Students, on the other hand, tend to believe that self-directed study is often a preferable mode of learning (Independent Study) and that they, as well as the faculty, have considerable competence to plan their educational experience (Interaction). Only about one third of the faculty in the liberal arts institutions, for example, believe that students are capable of joining them as partners in decision making about educational matters, while more than two-thirds of the students believe that they should be so involved.

Of course statements which give a broad general picture of the predominant disparities between faculty and student groups mask one of the most important uses of such data at the institutional and/or program level. That is, there are some students who do prefer a structured learning environment as do some faculty. Other students, like some of their faculty counterparts, are seemingly convinced that more independent study, more interdisciplinary investigations and a more egalitarian environment is most productive for them. It is not unusual to find that the proportions of students and faculty on individual campuses who hold each of these views differs. Thus, the studies we have been pursuing involve the identification of groups of students judged congruent and divergent with faculty on these campuses and the discovery of relationships which seem to merit further investigation and policy consideration by the institution. While general relationships are sought which will be useful for higher education in general, the use of the FOS and SOS appears most helpful on a particular campus (or even a sub-environment of a campus) for self-study and consideration of ways in which attitudinal congruence or incongruence is associated with differing outcomes for students.

For example, in one large public university it was found that for senior students ( $N = 999$ ) representing 68% of the senior class, students who were dissatisfied with their academic program had noticeably different educational views from students who were satisfied with their academic program. Students who were more dissatisfied scored higher on the exploratory cluster of SOS scales than did satisfied students. Students who expressed greatest satisfaction tended to view education in more practical terms, desired more formal modes of instruction, and placed less value in having a collegial role with faculty. Further, students who were dissatisfied were most disparate in their views from a representative 45% sample of faculty ( $N = 237$ ). Put another way, satisfied students had views more congruent with those of the faculty (Morstain, in press).. (See Fig. 2)

----- Figure 2 goes about here -----

Somewhat similar results were found at a much earlier stage in the students' education at a private liberal arts college for women. (Stark, in progress). Sophomore students ( $N = 131$ ) representing 79% of the students who were in attendance at the college for the fourth consecutive semester, were classified on the basis of their extent of satisfaction with faculty using the subscale "satisfaction with faculty" from the College Student Questionnaire, Part II. It was determined that students who were satisfied could be discriminated from those who were dissatisfied on the basis of the educational preferences they had expressed as measured by the SOS at the time of entrance. When SOS scale scores were used in a discriminant function analysis, it was possible to classify 71% of the satisfied students correctly. Satisfied students, like a 74% representative sample of the

faculty at this college, saw the exploration of ideas as their main educational goal. (See Fig. 3) It was not similarly possible to discriminate on the basis of SOS measures students who, in their sophomore year, scored in the highest or lowest groups on the CSQ subscale "satisfaction with other students." Although further analysis is underway, it appears that educational views which determine satisfaction specifically in the academic realm may be relatively fixed at the time of entrance to college, at least for the students who attend this college. In both of these satisfaction studies, (of sophomores at a liberal arts college and seniors at a public university) it is striking that the most satisfied students, considered as a group, held nearly identical views with the faculty concerning the purpose of education. (See Figures 2 and 3).

----- Insert Figure 3 about here -----

One manifestation of dissatisfaction is withdrawal from the college at an early stage. In both of the studies mentioned above, the most dissatisfied students already may have left the college. No information is available about students who withdrew early from the large university but a study was done of students who withdrew from the small liberal arts college (Stark, 1975). Of 236 students initially enrolled in the specific entering class, 46 had withdrawn by the end of the freshman year. These students who left very early differed from "continuing" peers in their preference for more independent learning opportunities and more egalitarian relationships with faculty. Their opinions were more disparate from opinions of faculty in this regard even when they first entered the college than were opinions of students who remained to continue for the sophomore year. (See Fig. 4)



----- Insert Figure 4 about here -----

A further analysis of the same class (Stark, in progress) considers students who withdrew during or after the sophomore year, but before the beginning of the junior year. These students, contrary to their classmates who left earlier, did not differ from the students who remained on dimensions of educational process or power relationships as measured by the SOS but did differ on the same dimension (Inquiry) which characterized those students who were dissatisfied with faculty as sophomores. A two stage rationale is tentatively postulated for attrition at this college, although no conclusions can be extended yet to other institutions.

At a more specific level, that of the individual course, the relationship of faculty and students' educational attitudes to course ratings given by students to professors teaching their classes has been examined (Morstain, 1976). Students (N = 359) in nine varied undergraduate courses at a public university and their instructors completed the SOS and FOS respectively. Students also completed the Student Instructional Report (Centra, 1973). Generally, students whose educational views were incongruent with those of their instructors gave different ratings when evaluating their instructors than did those whose views were congruent with those of the instructors. But the curvilinear relationship expected -- congruent students would give the highest course/instructor ratings, while incongruent students would give the lowest ratings -- was not found. Rather students whose views were incongruent with those of their instructors but who scored lower on a given SOS scale tended to evaluate instructors more negatively, while other students also incongruent but with scale scores higher than that of the instructor evaluated him/her



most positively. Congruent students formed a middle range group in their ratings of instructors. Since this was a pilot study at one institution, the relationship of congruence of educational attitudes to student ratings of instructors bears additional investigation.

Longitudinal studies are underway which will enable us to determine the stability of the educational attitudes of students in different settings. One might hypothesize that many students who decide to remain in a particular academic environment for a four-year period would tend to become more like the faculty in their educational attitudes. On the other hand students whose attitudes are extremely disparate from those of the faculty might experience alienation or a "back lash effect," moving, instead, farther from faculty views. It has already been shown in one college that students in an experimental curriculum which emphasized self-directed study experienced an accentuation over a year's time of those favorable attitudes they already held toward such a learning process (Morstain, 1973c). In addition to determining the direction of attitude change in different educational environments, it is also important to seek the factors which contribute to change and stability in educational orientations.

Information on the faculty population is still being collected; a norm group which is representative of the faculty population in four-year colleges and universities is not yet available. For a public university, the six scales for the faculty inventory have been shown to have an internal reliability about the same as that of the parallel student scales (alpha coefficients ranged from .69 to .89). Faculty, like the students, appear to differ in educational views according to their disciplinary orientation. A distinct

relationship has been found between scores on the FOS scales and the classification of a sample of faculty at a large public university into Holland's vocational choice categories based on academic discipline (Morstain and Smart, 1976). Evidence from the study of six liberal arts college indicates that in this population, more experienced faculty (more than 10 years teaching) score significantly higher on the preparatory scales, (Achievement, Assignment Learning and Assessment) than do their less experienced colleagues. No differences were found on any of the orientation scales between faculty at the liberal arts colleges who were satisfied with the educational goals of their school (82%) and those who were dissatisfied (18%) with the school's educational goals. Exploration of other variables is underway for the six colleges as a group and on a college by college basis. (Stark, in progress).

### Discussion

Relationships discovered in a number of these studies support the desirability of conducting research on academic satisfaction, attrition related to academic dissatisfaction and other potential associates of congruence/incongruence in student and faculty attitudes in a specific milieu -- small colleges or subenvironments of a large college with a homogeneous academic ethos. For example grouping together all students in a large public university on measures of satisfaction may obscure important relationships. Professional students differ from arts and science students in their views of educational purpose, process and teacher-student relationships. Thus, one group of students may be satisfied with their academic program for the same reasons that another group is dissatisfied. Most prior research has examined the relation of student-institution fit to student outcomes on an institution-wide or cross-institutional basis. It may be that patterns most amenable to profitable discussion and adaptive

response by colleges will emerge more meaningfully when research is concentrated on various program areas within institutions. The results thus far indicate that the Orientations Surveys may exhibit their greatest potential as institutional research tools in specific settings where action implied by the findings may be contemplated.

Several questions which have potential for action research have emerged as we have gained more information about the relationship between student and faculty orientations, but attempts to answer them have not yet been initiated. Is it possible to match students with educational advisors and classroom teachers on the basis of educational preferences as expressed on the SOS and FOS? What will be the results of such a matching? In point of fact, counselors in many college intuitively have been matching students and faculty for years. And, particularly in recent years, when older students returning to school have indicated a desire for relatively structured learning experiences, they have been assigned for counsel to faculty generally believed to provide appropriate structure and support. A systematic matching of students and faculty on the basis of measured educational preferences has not yet been attempted.

Considerable evidence indicates that students who seek certain academic programs have educational attitudes which are like those of other students who also enroll in those programs. Furthermore, the faculty can be distinguished by educational attitudes which are associated with their field of expertise. Might it be possible to identify students who, on the basis of their educational preferences, could be predicted to be dissatisfied with a particular program because the curricular-instructional philosophy is at odds with what they

believe most appropriate for them? If such a potential identification could be made, counselors could be ready to provide the proper support at the time the student discovers this incongruence and help him/her resolve problems that may arise.

Similar considerations could be extended to the admissions scene. Elucidation for students of the educational philosophies of faculty members would be in keeping with the spirit of providing better information to students for choice among institutions and among programs within institutions. Students are well aware of their own educational preferences (although no implication can be made that what they prefer is what will best facilitate their learning) and, if they are to have the opportunity and responsibility of making informed choices, they might well know the professor's philosophy and intended procedures before a course begins. They will become aware of it in a very short time after enrollment in any case. Prior research indicates that entering freshmen students have an unrealistic idea of what they will encounter in college and thus are subject to extreme disillusionment within a few weeks after their first semester begins (Stern, 1970). Such a phenomenon might be prevented by more openness about the orientations professors actually implement in the classroom.

There are many implications for more effective and efficient use of faculty members on the basis of the preferences they express on the Faculty Orientations Survey. What, for example, is the effect of these attitudes toward the formation of teams of faculty for joint teaching efforts? Is it reasonable to expect that faculty members who view the educational process quite differently can work well together? Is it possible to pair

faculty members with divergent views in such a way that one or both of them will change their attitudes? Which faculty have a proclivity for interdisciplinary exploration of ideas and which feel so strongly about their own disciplines that they probably will be non-contributing members of an interdisciplinary team? Which faculty have so little confidence in students' abilities to be involved in designing their own learning experiences that they logically would not be the ones asked to serve as mentors in self-directed programs?

### Conclusion

Colleges (and individual programs within colleges and universities) differ widely in terms of the particular academic ethos which attracts and retains certain types of students. Faculty help to shape the curricular-instructional environment, both in their role as formulators of academic policy and as implementors of particular teaching styles in the classroom. Students make judgments among institutions, choosing one which they believe will suit their needs and in which they hope to find the learning environment hospitable. All too often, choices are based on inadequate information and knowledge; the instructional environment is most commonly a missing element in such decisions. Resulting conflicts are manifested in disillusionment, dissatisfaction or even alienation of students, in campus debates based on emotional rather than rational grounds and sometimes in departure of the student from the institution which he/she had initially viewed as a desirable choice.

Based on their individual orientations, faculty debate policy and devise curricular processes, sometimes with little understanding of student



learning style preferences. Attempts at improvement of teaching, at least as reflected in better student ratings, may fail because some students feel that the particular instructor's style can never result in a good learning environment for them.

Administrators encourage interdisciplinary efforts which fail when the faculty involved discover that they cannot agree on even the basic purpose of the course, much less the process through which the learning experience is to be implemented. In some colleges career-oriented programs are tried and abandoned because they conflict with the prevailing educational philosophy of faculty, while attempts in other colleges to broaden the liberal education components fail for precisely the same reasons.

For an institution to be responsive to changing educational needs of students, to use its faculty resources effectively and to maintain institutional viability, a necessary first step is to better understand the educational views and preferences of the key participants, namely the students and faculty. Where these views conflict, the conflict must be faced, the reasons for differences ascertained and experimentation undertaken to facilitate optimum matching of students and faculty. Consideration should be given to recognition of more than one serviceable academic environment to accomodate the diversity of student and faculty views. The institutional research technique presented here is one direct method of detecting potential conflict and developing better understanding of the person-environment interaction within a given institution.

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Figure 1

ORIENTATION PROFILES FOR FACULTY AND FRESHMEN  
AT SIX LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

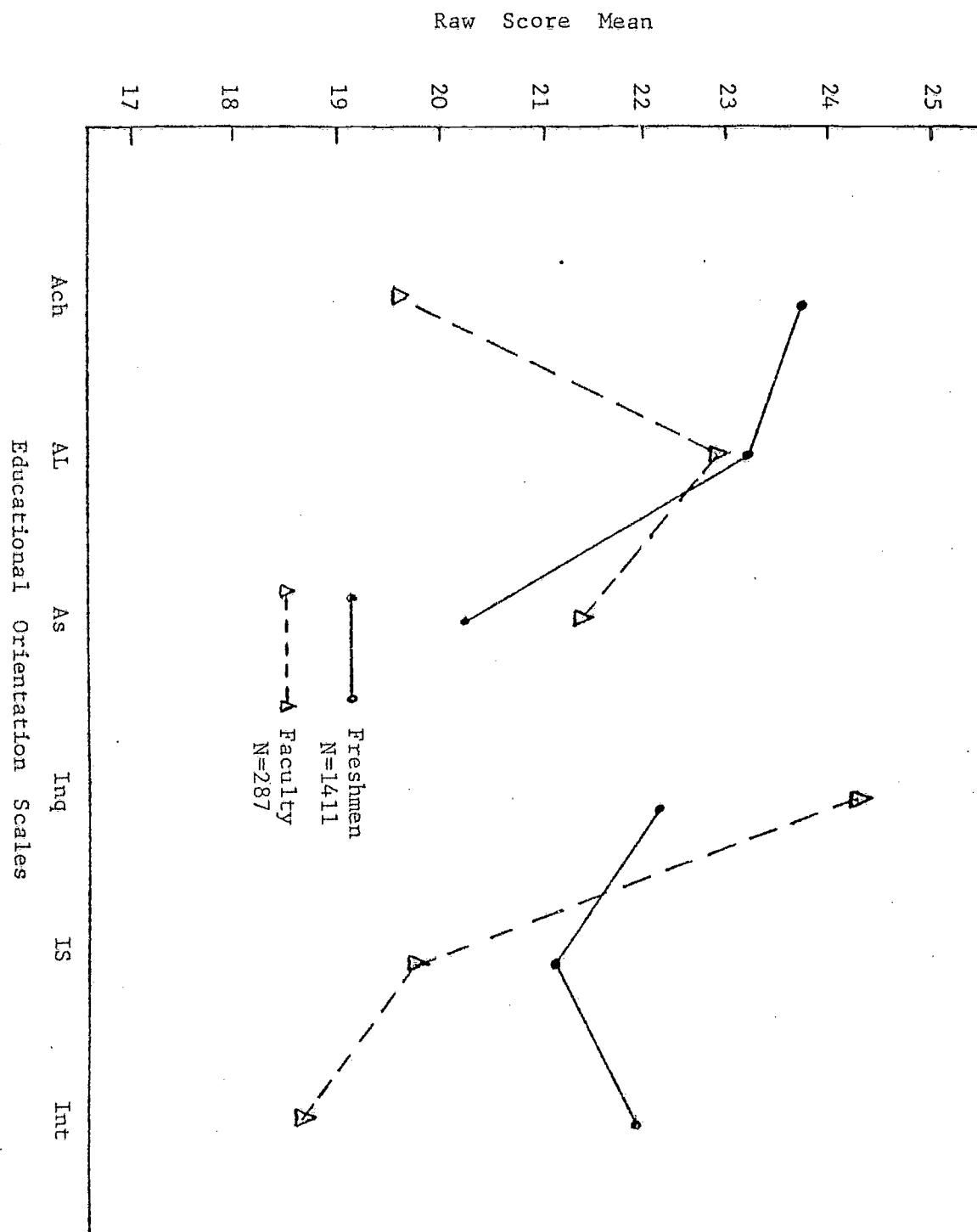


Figure 2

ORIENTATION PROFILES FOR THREE STUDENT SATISFACTION  
GROUPS AND FACULTY  
(UNIVERSITY SENIORS)

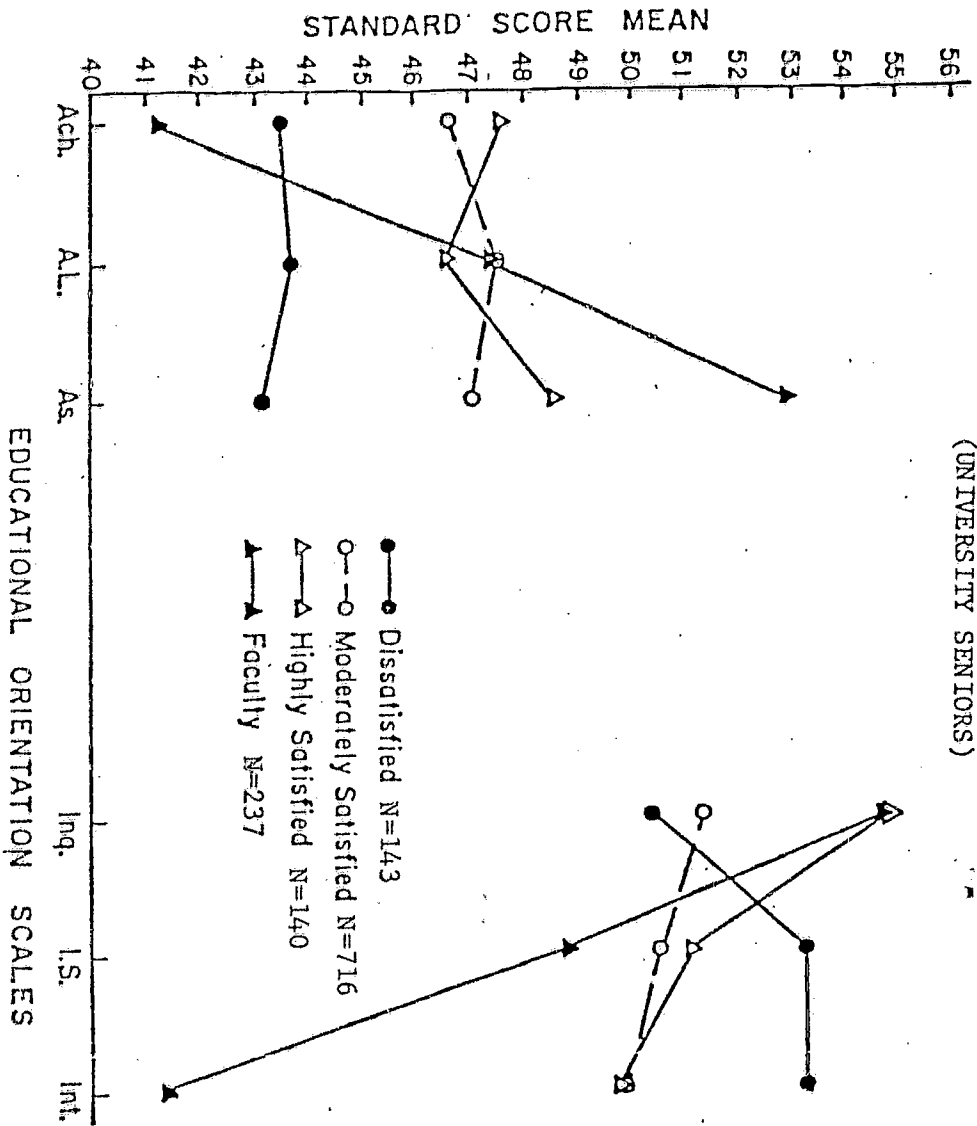


Figure 3  
ORIENTATION PROFILES FOR TWO  
STUDENT GROUPS AND FACULTY  
(College Sophomores)

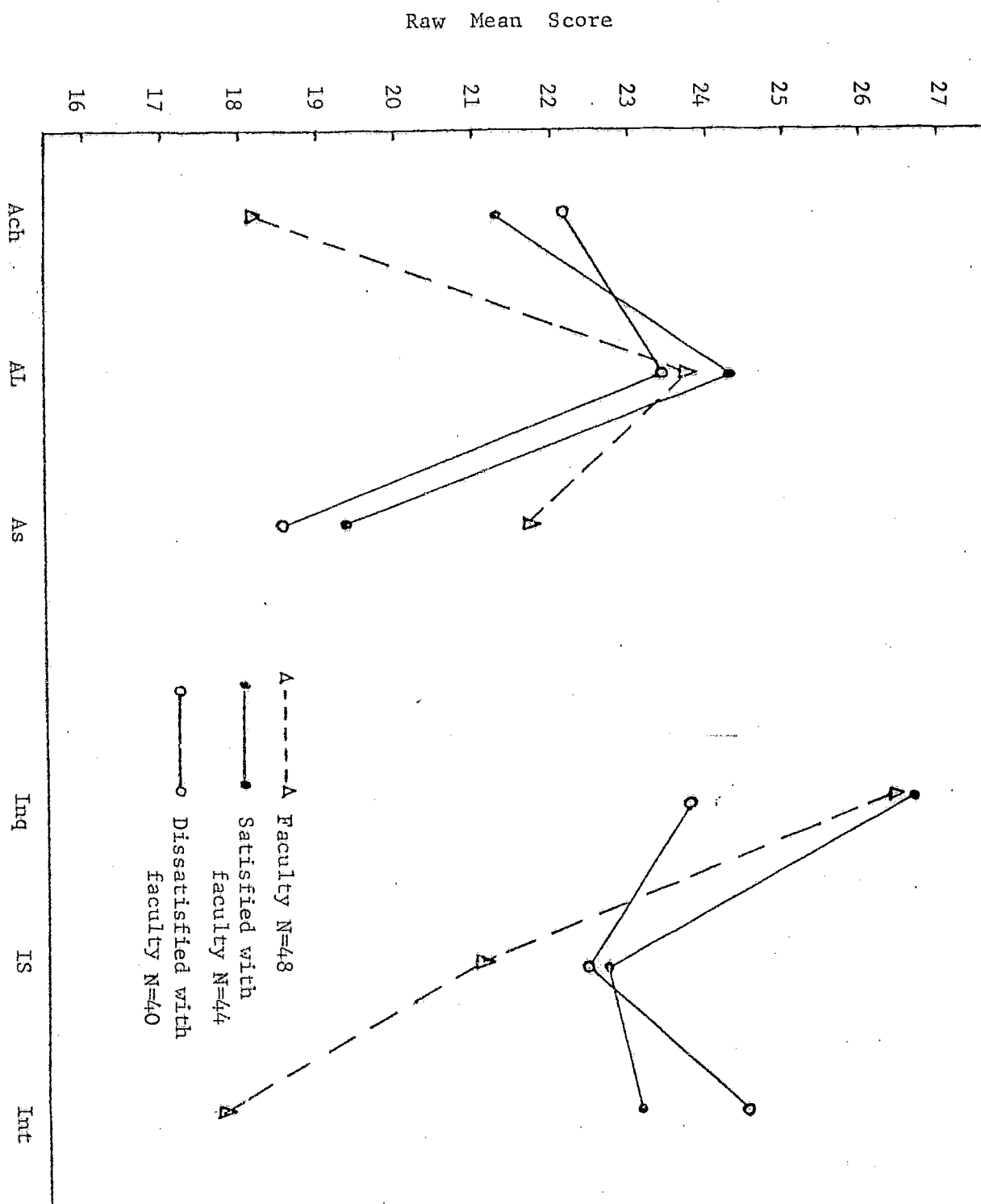


Figure 4

MEAN SCALE SCORES ON SELECTED EDUCATIONAL ORIENTATIONS  
FOR FACULTY, CONTINUING STUDENTS, & STUDENTS WHO WITHDREW/TRANSFERRED  
(Private Liberal Arts College)

